

## Are Political Parties Recapturing the Streets of Europe?

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**Book Part — Published Version**

## Are Political Parties Recapturing the Streets of Europe?

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## 11 Are Political Parties Recapturing the Streets of Europe?

### A Cross-regional Study of Party Protests in the Great Recession

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*Endre Borbáth and Swen Hutter*

#### 11.1 Introduction

The chapter focuses on political parties' activities in the streets. That is, it takes the main collective actors engaged in electoral competition but looks at their involvement in a major form of non-electoral mobilization. More specifically, the chapter concentrates on the level and type of protests that are sponsored by political parties. Sponsorship is broadly defined and means that parties (co-)organize, take part in, and/or call for the participation in a protest event (Rucht 1998: 41). We refer to our research object as party-sponsored protests or, in short, party protests. Our main questions are as follows: To what extent do political parties sponsor protests in Europe? How does the level and type of party protests differ across the European macro regions? And, most importantly for this volume, have the recent economic and political crises in Europe significantly changed parties' activities in the streets?

By studying party protests, we complement other research on how parties have responded to the economic upheaval and mounting distrust towards representative institutions and political parties in the countries hardest hit by the Great Recession and the subsequent Euro crisis (see Chapter 1). Against the background of parties' withdrawal from civil society (Mair 2013; Schmitter 2001) – as well-documented by declining party membership or party identification (e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Poguntke et al. 2016; van Biezen et al. 2012) – the economic crisis might potentially constitute a critical juncture for the relationship between parties and civil society.

Apart from adapting their programmatic stances (e.g. Conti et al. 2017; Traber et al. 2017), established and new political parties might try to realign with the social forces in the streets to show their responsiveness to increasing public pressure. Following the scenario outlined in the previous chapter (Chapter 10), opposition parties should be

particularly keen on ‘riding the wave of political contention’ to profit from the close links between protest mobilization and electoral punishment of incumbents. Most telling examples for the closely coupled dynamics of opposition in protest and electoral politics are the rise of so-called ‘movement parties’ in southern Europe (SE) (della Porta et al. 2017). Regarding party protests, we should thus expect that parties are more likely to sponsor protests and to join forces with other challengers of the dominant austerity policies.

However, as we show in this chapter, political parties have not been very successful in recapturing the streets, i.e. in increasing their standing in the protest arena (see also Borbáth and Hutter 2020). By contrast, we observe differentiated political arenas and a sort of ‘crowding-out’ of parties from the streets in SE in the shadow of the Great Recession. The latter finding mirrors the interdependence of the economic and political crisis dynamics in the region which led to the discrediting of established political elites and parties. The finding also confirms the conclusions of previous chapters on the character and key actors driving the protest wave in SE (see Chapters 4 and 5). Thus, our findings put the emerging links between social movements and new challenger parties in perspective. As important these linkages might have been at some moment in the development of these parties, the large-N approach we adopt here qualifies the general role political parties played in mobilizing protestors in response to the Great Recession.

The structure of the chapter reflects the general ambition of the volume as we expect cross-regional differences not only because of the varying extent of the crisis but also because of the long-term trends in the structure and dynamics of political conflict. As the literature has not yet addressed cross-regional variations in how parties have traditionally crossed the boundaries of the electoral arena and mobilized in the streets, the first two sections provide the theoretical framework of our analysis. In Section 11.2, we rely on Kitschelt’s (2003) differentiation thesis to get to our baseline assumptions about the intensity and type of party protests. More precisely, we expect that party protests are rather rare and show a distinct profile, i.e. they center on cultural issues. Next in Section 11.3, we highlight that Kitschelt’s prediction very much reflects the evolution of conflict and interest intermediation in north-western Europe (NWE). By contrast, we expect different varieties of party protests in SE and especially in eastern Europe (EE). In EE, political parties are often organized in a top-down fashion and aim to control existing means of mobilization in order to consolidate their power. It is also the region where democratization happened most recently and there is a comparatively weak ‘non-partisan’ civil

society to counterbalance the mobilization efforts of parties. Once we have established our baseline assumption and its regional variations, in Section 11.4 we sketch the potential impact of the Great Recession as a critical juncture for the way political parties approach protest politics before we empirically test our expectations in Section 11.5.

The data used in this volume allow us to draw the big picture of party protests in a large set of thirty European countries. This has not yet been done, reflecting the bifurcation of research on elections and political parties, on the one hand, and research on protest and social movements, on the other (McAdam and Tarrow 2010, 2013; see also Chapter 10 of this volume). Moreover, such analyses have been hampered by a lack of appropriate datasets (the few large-N protest event datasets usually contain no detailed information on organizational sponsors). In our opinion, drawing the big picture is an important first cut at an interesting research topic and complements recent case studies (see Cisar and Navrátil 2017; Dolezal 2017; Heaney and Rojas 2015; Hutter 2013).

## **11.2 Party Protests in Europe: Relatively Rare and Distinct**

We rely on Herbert Kitschelt's work (2003) to establish our baseline argument about the level and types of party protests in Europe. According to Kitschelt, we have witnessed an increasing differentiation in the patterns of interest mobilization since the end of the 'Golden Age' of Western capitalism. According to his argument, the post-war period was characterized by fused patterns of political mobilization, while the various arenas have become increasingly differentiated since the 1970s.

The progressive differentiation of modes of collective interest mobilization and growing separation of political entrepreneurs in movements, interest groups, and parties from each other is the big story of the last third of the twentieth century in European democracies. (Kitschelt 2003: 89)

In a theoretical tour de force, Kitschelt explains this development by learning processes of political entrepreneurs and their followers which were fueled by economic, social, and political-institutional changes. Two challenges faced by political entrepreneurs are of central importance for the argument: problems of collective action and social choice. In contrast to social movements and interest groups, political parties are portrayed as the actors that have invested the most in solving both types of problems. Political parties frame their stakes as long-term,

enduring, and encompassing programs. To realize such programs, political entrepreneurs need to invest in an infrastructure that allows communicating with potential adherents and disbursing selective incentives for solving collective action problems (Olson 1965). Furthermore, parties need to invest in techniques of collective preference alignment (e.g. formal rules for aggregating individual preferences into organizational purposes). Such techniques help to overcome social choice problems, 'namely, the instability and paralysis of a collectivity with many activists that results from the heterogeneity of individual preferences' (Kitschelt 2003: 85). In the long run, political actors that have invested differently in solving problems of collective action and social choice are more or less adapted to compete in the different arenas. Importantly for party protests, Kitschelt (2003: 97) argues, 'Parties focus increasingly on electoral competition, at the expense of interest group representation or electoral movement protest actions. ... Social movements, finally, concentrate on public actions outside institutionalized arenas of bargaining to affect public opinion and political elites through the media.'

Regarding the catalysts of the breakdown of traditionally 'fused' patterns of interest intermediation, Kitschelt (2003: 90ff) considers such diverse developments as the revolution of information technology, the up-skilling of the labour force, the increasing openness of national economies, the intensifying physical and social mobility as well as the internal politics of the welfare state. These processes have fundamentally transformed European societies and ultimately undermined the social bases of mass parties and party-centred networks which characterized European democracies in the Golden age of capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s.

Arguably, these processes have transformed the party systems in two waves: a first wave driven by the mobilization of new social movements and left-libertarian parties in the 1970s and early 1980s, and a second wave driven by the mobilization of the populist radical right since the 1990s. Both driving forces are seen as breaking with the past and challenging the political order of their time. Most importantly, the challenge arose from new issues and demands that these actors brought into the political process. The challengers from the left advocated individual autonomy, the free choice of lifestyles, and other universalistic values. The challengers from the right, by contrast, focused on immigration and European integration as threats to the homogenous nation-state. Both waves concerned above all cultural issues. That is, they primarily transformed the meaning of the cultural dimension of the two-dimensional political

spaces. Interpreting the impact of the new left, Kitschelt (1994) re-baptized the cultural dimension as 'libertarian-authoritarian' dimension, while Kriesi et al. (2008, 2012) focusing on the impact of the populist radical right labelled it as 'integration-demarcation.' What is common to both accounts is the emphasis on the new divides which weaken traditional patterns of interest intermediation and the role of mainstream parties.

In his analysis of protest politics in six NWE countries from 1975 to 2005, Hutter (2014b) has shown that the new integration-demarcation cleavage has restructured protest politics as well. Most importantly, issues centring on cultural liberalism and – since the 1990s – immigration have dominated the protest landscapes. However, the impact of the populist-right has been less important than the left-libertarian turn given that the protest arenas has been mainly used by the political left. The challengers from the right, in contrast, tend to follow a different logic in the way they use protest and electoral politics to mobilize their adherents. Given ideological and strategic considerations, the political right tends to refrain from street protests, the more successful it gets in electoral politics. Overall, this is also reflected in a lower overall share of protests sponsored by parties from the right (around 40 per cent) compared to parties from the left (around 60 per cent) in the six countries under scrutiny (Hutter 2014: 125).

Based on Kitschelt's differentiation thesis and the observed changes in the structure of political conflict, we expect rather disconnected arenas of mobilization in contemporary European democracies in terms of the main actors involved in electoral and protest politics. Thus, our baseline assumption is that political parties are no longer dominant actors in European protest politics (*differentiation hypothesis*). Rather, we expect that party-sponsored protest events make up a small share of all coded events. The protest arena should be the site where less institutionalized social movement organizations and other civil society actors mobilize their constituencies. Moreover, the baseline assumption of differentiated political arenas leads us to expect that, if at all, protests are sponsored by parties with an 'outsider' status (*outsider hypothesis*). We refer here to both parties' ideological radicalism and their formal power, as indicated by parliamentary representation and opposition status. In addition, the dominant challenges to the established order let us expect that if parties still use the streets, they do so to push forward their demands related to new cultural issues associated with green and radical right parties and not traditional economic concerns.

### 11.3 Varieties of Party Protests in Europe

Do the arguments about the limited extent of party protests and their specific shape hold across the European continent? Or should we rather expect different regional varieties? To answer these questions, we would like to emphasize two important scope conditions of the differentiation argument, namely, the far-reaching restructuring of political conflict and the rise of a strong independent civil society. Both conditions seem crucial for the establishment of functionally differentiated arenas that are populated by specialized political actors.

Regarding the first scope condition, it seems important to note that the sketched two-fold transformation of political conflict seems mainly a story of NWE. Political conflict in SE and EE has been far less transformed by the two waves. In bold strokes, the party systems in SE have until recently remained essentially bipolar with cultural and economic issues amalgamated in one single left–right dimension (e.g., Hutter et al. 2018; Polk and Rovny 2016) and parties weakly rooted in the cleavage structure (Gunther 2005). In particular, the rise of the populist radical right has been comparatively weak in most SE countries. In turn, the lack of a strong new left and populist radical right has contributed to keeping the new cultural issues rather off the agenda of electoral politics. Also, economic issues have been more important in structuring protest politics in the south of Europe as are alliances between actors from the old and the new left (e.g. della Porta 2007; Koopmans 1996; see also Chapter 6, this volume).

The development of political conflict in EE differs from the general story in yet another way. First, eastern Europe party systems still appear to be much less institutionalized than party systems in western Europe (e.g. Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2016). The very high level of volatility in these systems since the democratic transition is the most important empirical evidence for their lack of institutionalization (e.g., Powell and Tucker 2014). Second, many of the parties on the left in EE trace back their organizational origin to former communist parties and struggle to dissociate themselves from the former regimes (Tavits and Letki 2009). Lacking strong parties of the ‘new left’ to challenge the post-communist successors, anti-system mobilization is often left to the right in both the electoral and the protest arenas (Borbáth and Gessler 2020). Finally, the emerging new conflicts in EE usually centre on cultural issues but of a different kind (Coman 2010; Rovny 2014). As Kriesi (2016: 38) aptly put it, ‘[t]he common denominator of the cultural issues mobilizing the traditionalist side of the CEE electorates



seems to be a 'defensive nationalism' asserting itself against internal enemies (such as ethnic minorities: Russians, Roma, and Jews) and external ones (such as foreign corporations colonizing the national economy)'.

The second important condition of the differentiation story seems the development of a strong and independent civil society. Even if we expect that the traditionally dominant mass parties might withdraw from certain sites of mobilization, there need to be other collective political organizations with the capacity to fill the 'void'. In fact, there is a nearly universal consensus in the literature on post-communist civil society about the weaknesses of these organizations in EE. The weak civil society is often considered to be the result of the lack of trust in these societies, originating from the totalitarian past, as well as of the non-transparent and elite-driven transition processes (Bernhard 1996; Howard 2003). In addition, the organizations that have emerged are often financially dependent on state resources, private sponsors, and/or transnational networks, and these resources are often linked to a specific political agenda. As a result, many organizations stay away from politics altogether or turn into vehicles of realizing the political goals of their sponsors (e.g. Lomax 1997).

Taking these scope conditions into account, we expect that the differentiation hypothesis holds mainly for NWE, and we expect different types and levels of party protests in SE and, in particular, in EE (*regional varieties hypothesis*). More precisely, we expect that political parties are more likely to sponsor protests in EE than in NWE; SE should be an intermediate case. In addition, we expect that the type of sponsored events reflects the dominant conflicts in the different regions. That is, party protests in NWE and EE should centre more on cultural issues compared to SE where economic issues should be more salient.

#### **11.4 The Great Recession as a Critical Juncture?**

In the period covered by our research, Europe experienced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Regarding its influence on party-sponsored protest events, we want to emphasize here again that the crisis developed in stages and, in many countries, the economic crisis has developed alongside a political crisis (see Chapter 1). In general, we expect that the economic crisis and an aggravated political crisis remain not without consequences for how political parties get involved in protests.

In addition to programmatic changes (e.g. Conti et al. 2017; Traber et al. 2017), political parties (in opposition) should have strong incentives to realign with the social forces in the streets to show their responsiveness to mounting public pressure. In turn parties are expected to be more likely to co-sponsor protest events in times of crisis. As highlighted in the previous chapter of this volume (Chapter 10), protests did reinforce the electoral punishment of incumbents under conditions of economic hardship. Thus, opposition parties could profit in electoral terms if they are associated with the challenges against the governments in the streets. The most telling examples for this association are the transformed or newly emerging challenger parties in SE. While their classification as ‘movement parties’ is contested, the new challengers, such as Syriza in Greece, Movimento Cinque Stelle in Italy, or Podemos in Spain, clearly appropriated claims and frames from the anti-austerity protests and, in part, they were closely related to the activists’ networks involved in staging the protests (see della Porta et al. 2017).

However, given the strong interdependence between economic and political crises dynamics, we do not expect that political parties have been very successful in recapturing the street, i.e. in increasing their relative standing in the protest arena. By contrast, we expect that the crisis leads to a sort of ‘crowding-out effect’. Thus, the period after 2008 should be characterized by even lower levels of party-sponsored events than the pre-crisis period (*crowding-out hypothesis*). This effect should be strongest in the countries of SE. These countries have been very hard hit by the economic crisis and trust in political parties, as modes of interest articulation, has dropped most dramatically in recent years (see Chapter 1). These dynamics should not only result in the most pronounced protest waves (see Chapter 4), but also in bottom-up mobilization by new actors which does (at least initially) not reinforce the relative presence of parties in the streets but rather breaks existing relations between parties and social movements. Thus, as important as the emerging link between protests and the new challenger parties might be, we do not expect that they trigger a more general rise of political parties as mobilizing agents in the protest arena in the countries hardest hit by the crisis.

By contrast, it seems more likely that the crisis should be associated with a change in the type of party protests because political parties are expected to align with the major challengers in protest politics regarding the issues they emphasize. Therefore, we expect that, even if relatively less prominent, party protests should reflect the rise in economic and political grievances. Overall, we should thus find increasing

party protests related to economic and political issues (*'riding the wave hypothesis'*). Therefore, considering the development of the major issues in the protest arena in the different regions (see Chapter 6), we expect the rise of party protests on economic issues in NWE and EE in the shock period, while these types of party protests should become relatively more important in SE in the subsequent Euro-crisis period. Finally, if parties are trying to ride the wave, we should also see a pronounced increase of party protests related to culturally conservative claims in EE in all crisis periods.

### 11.5 Empirical Findings

For the empirical analysis, we focus on the subset of protest events in the dataset for which we have coded at least one political party as an actor involved in protest events. Moreover, to avoid problems of missing data for our key variable of interest (i.e. share of party protests), we decided to restrict the sample to those events for which at least one organizational sponsor was reported in the news. The decision to exclude protests which do not have any organizational sponsor was guided by an empirical rationale. Our sources are international newswires, and these tend to often report on protest events in a brief, schematic style without listing any sponsoring organizations (see Chapter 3). To minimize the impact of this description bias and its variation across news agencies and countries, we focus on the subset of the dataset with the least amount of missing data. In addition, restricting the sample to events with at least one organizational sponsor considers the potential underreporting of parties in international news wires as compared to national newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

While it is difficult to directly test our baseline assumption, the overall share of around 14 per cent party-sponsored events indicates that such events are a relatively rare phenomenon in the European protest landscape. In line with the differentiation argument, political parties' primary interest seems to lie in the electoral arena. It is also important to repeat that the value compares events that are co-sponsored

<sup>1</sup> Note that the tests reported in Chapter 3 highlight some underreporting for four of the six countries. Importantly, the bias seems stronger if we compare our English-language news agencies to national newspapers than to national news agencies (the latter were used in the comparison for the two Eastern European countries in the sample, i.e. Hungary and Poland). We further checked the impact of these bias on our results by omitting the selected countries from our analysis and by running regressions that consider the various sources of bias introduced in Chapter 3. Overall, these tests show that the substantive results in this chapter are robust.

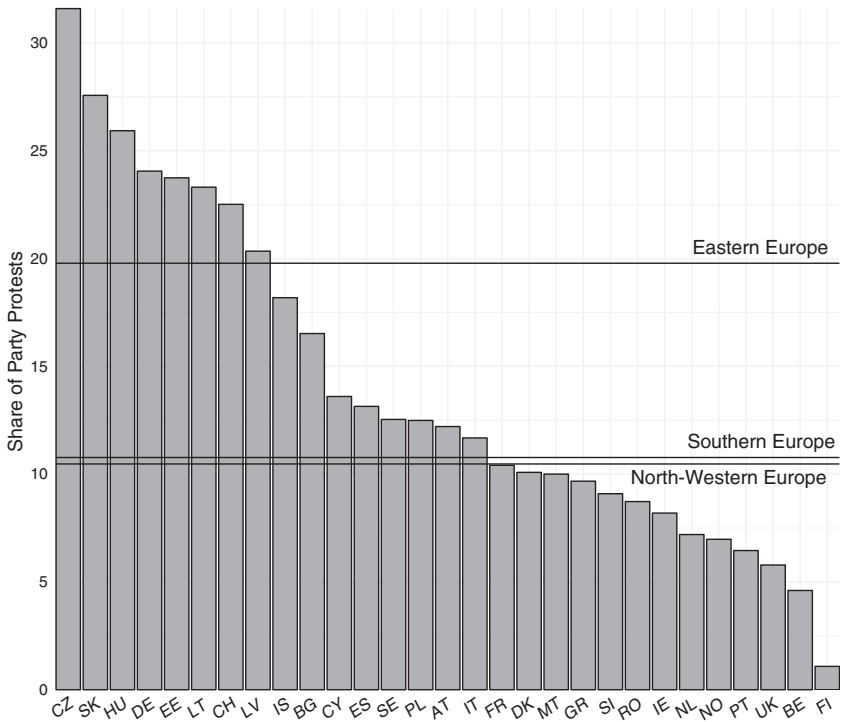


Figure 11.1 Average share of party protests in thirty European countries.  
*Note:* The figure shows the share of party-sponsored protests relative to the events with at least one organizational sponsor.

by parties with events for which we coded at least one organizational sponsor. Thus, the share is even smaller if we consider all coded protests including those without any reported organizational sponsor (7.5 per cent).

Nevertheless, the 14 per cent highlights that parties occasionally sponsor protests and, in line with our expectations, their relative presence in the protest arena varies across countries and over time. To show the large cross-national differences, Figure 11.1 presents the share of party-sponsored protests in each of the thirty countries during the sixteen years under scrutiny. According to our data, the Czech Republic experienced the highest share of party-sponsored protests with a share of 31 per cent, whereas such events make up only 1 per cent in the case of Finland. Broadly speaking, most of the countries that saw the highest shares of party protests are in EE. As Figure 11.1 shows, seven of

Table 11.1. *Average share of party protests by region*

Region	Overall	Normal times	Shock period	Euro crisis	Refugee crisis
North-western Europe	10.5 (18.4)	9.5 (21.9)	9.6 (13.9)	12.8 (13.6)	18.9 (5.6)
Southern Europe	10.8 (21.8)	13.3 (30.3)	5.0 (7.6)	8.7 (8.8)	11.8 (11.0)
Eastern Europe	22.4 (30.8)	21.0 (28.6)	20.2 (25.2)	24.7 (36.1)	43.2 (27.5)
All regions	13.7 (22.2)	13.7 (26.4)	11.7 (14.3)	13.8 (16.5)	25.3 (11.3)

*Note:* The table shows the relative share of party-sponsored protests in per cent of all protests with at least one coded organizational sponsor. The values in parentheses show the relative share of participants involved in these events.

the top-ten countries in terms of party-sponsored events are from that region: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Bulgaria. In contrast, the countries from NWE and SE are remarkably similar and show lower levels of party protests. As Table 11.1 shows, the average share of party-sponsored protests is around 22.4 per cent in EE compared to around 10.5 per cent in NWE and 10.8 per cent in SE. Overall, this supports our expectations about regional variety in the level of party protests.

In terms of event-level characteristics, parties tend to sponsor relatively large protests. In SE and NWE, party sponsored protests account for about one fifth of protest turnout, almost twice as high as their share of events indicates. In EE, almost one third of protest participation happens in party sponsored protests. Unsurprisingly, parties primarily sponsor demonstrations (about 70 per cent) or petitions (about 10 per cent in NWE and SE and about 20 per cent in EE), while they are much less likely to be involved in industrial actions (3 per cent) or violent confrontations (11 per cent).

Figure 11.2 shows the type of issues parties contest in the protest arena by region. Overall, parties are most likely to sponsor events centred on cultural issues. Comparing the share of cultural issues (i.e. the total of what we label as cultural liberalism and conservatism; see also Chapter 6) with the share of political issues, we see that the former tends to dominate in NWE and EE but not in SE. The differences regarding cultural issues are associated with the fact that, in SE, there is hardly any party-sponsored counter mobilization against the claims of the new social movements. Moreover, in relative terms, economic protests are most important in SE. In contrast, in EE, demands against immigration and for cultural conservatism are more salient in the

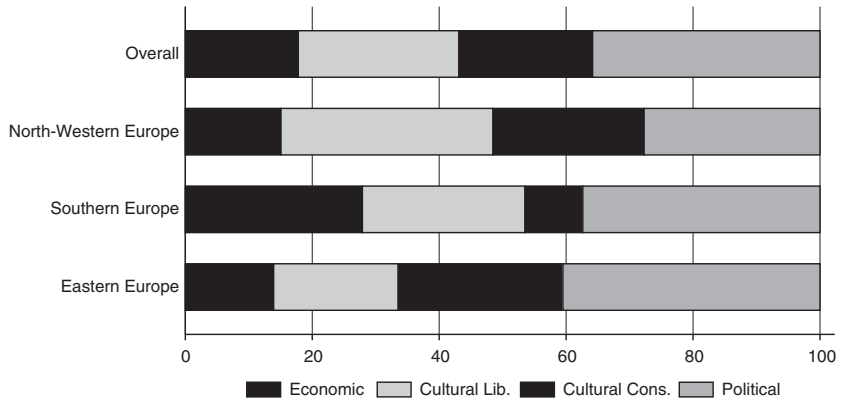


Figure 11.2 Share of issue categories of party protests by region. *Note:* The figure shows the share of an issue category in per cent of all events sponsored by parties, centred on any of the four categories in each region. Other issues have been excluded from the calculation (see Table 11.2).

protest scene. Finally, NWE parties sponsor protests organized around claims on both sides of the ‘cultural’ divide. This is indicated by the relatively similar share of the categories ‘cultural liberalism’ and ‘cultural conservatism’. Overall, the issue claims of party protests resemble the issue claims in the protest arena at large (see Chapter 6), which suggest that parties organize protests with a similar focus to other organizations in the protest arena (see later).

Figure 11.3 presents the type of parties which are likely to sponsor protests. First, our dataset allows to differentiate between ‘left’ and ‘right’ parties. Second, we followed the approach in Chapter 10 and coded parties as either mainstream or non-mainstream based on the classification into party families. The conservative, Christian democratic, social democratic, and liberal party families are classified as mainstream, whereas parties from all other party families are classified as non-mainstream. Finally, we checked whether the parties in the streets were in opposition or in government and whether they were represented in the national parliament or not.

The results on the ideology of the parties in the streets of Europe underline what we have already seen when looking at the issue composition (again, see Figure 11.2): While in NWE and especially in SE party protests are associated with the political left, the political right is taking the conflicts to the streets in EE. The other three features (mainstream vs. non-mainstream, opposition status, and parliamentary

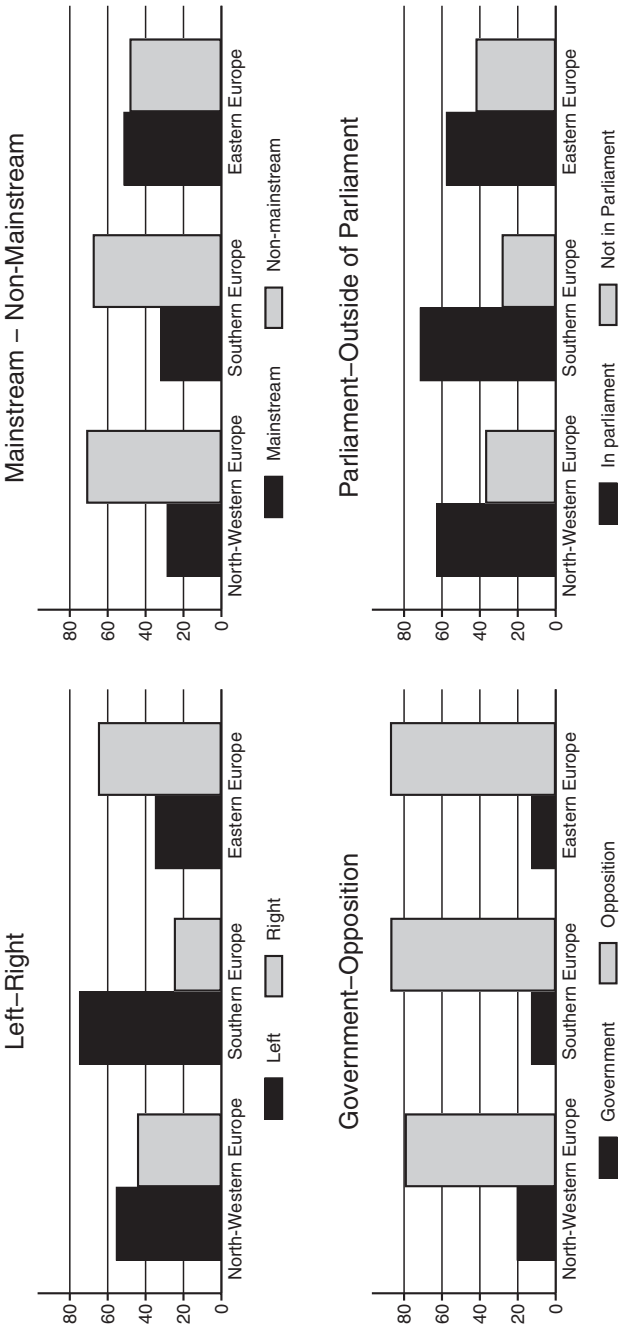


Figure 11.3 Types of parties in party protests.

*Note:* The figure shows the relative share of a certain category in per cent of all coded party-sponsored protests by region.

representation) support our ‘outsider hypothesis’ but again point to regional differences. Although party protests in all regions are almost exclusively used by opposition parties, we observe the dominance of non-mainstream parties only in NWE and SE. The less prominent role of challenger parties in the streets of EE reflects (1) the weakness of the radical left in the region and (2) the rather blurred distinction between mainstream and non-mainstream actors in terms of their mobilization strategies (e.g. Greskovits 2017). Finally, taking their weak position in the political systems into account, parties that are not represented in the national parliament are still fairly visible in the streets of Europe (with more than 20 per cent in all three regions). However, this time, we observe the strongest ‘outsider’ bias for EE, where such parties account for more than 40 per cent of all coded party protests. In part, this finding is related to the less institutionalized nature of the party systems because some of the ‘strong’ parties in the streets might gain parliamentary representation only after we have captured their presence in the protest arena.

Having tested our baseline assumptions on the general relevance of party protests and their cross-regional varieties, let us now focus on the effects of the Great Recession and the subsequent crises. To begin, Figure 11.4 presents the development of party protests by year. More specifically, it shows the trends in the relative shares of party-sponsored protests and the absolute numbers across Europe as well as for the different European regions. All figures include a horizontal reference line for the mean and three vertical reference lines: one for 2008, the start of the shock period of the financial crisis, one for 2010, the start of the Euro-crisis period and one for 2014, the start of the refugee crisis. Moreover, Table 11.1 indicates the overall averages for the four periods (normal times, shock period, Euro crisis, and refugee crisis) for each European region separately. In general, the results indicate that parties have in none of the years become the dominant actors in European protest politics. However, there are important short-term fluctuation, reflecting the dynamics of the crisis.

In all three regions, parties withdraw from sponsoring protests in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, i.e. in the shock period of the crisis (see Figure 11.4 and Table 11.1). During the Euro crisis, parties returned to sponsor protests, first in north-west, then in the east, and last in the south. The developments during the shock period and the Euro crisis in SE tend to support the idea that when an economic crisis co-occurs with a crisis of representation, political parties become less important for organizing street protests. In contrast, they are rather crowded out by other types of organizational networks.



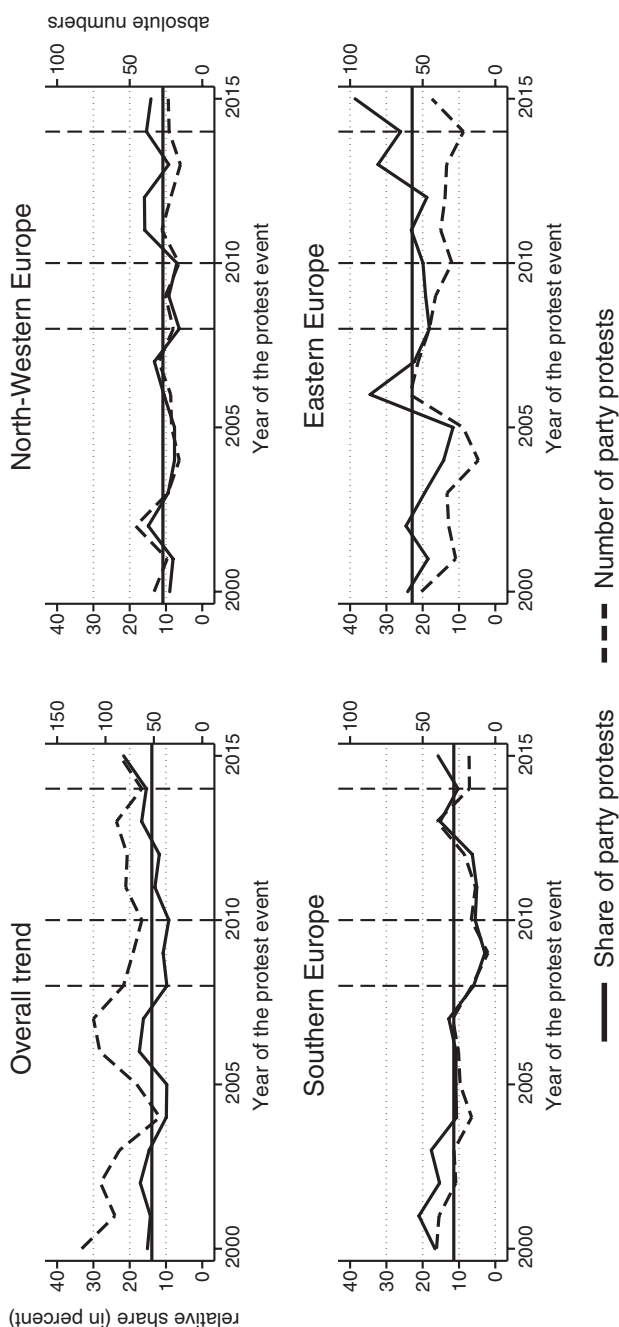


Figure 11.4 The development of party protests by region and year.

*Note:* The figure shows the share of party-sponsored protests in per cent of all protests with at least one organizational sponsor being reported by region and year (solid line). Moreover, it shows the absolute number of such party-sponsored protests by year (dashed line). For the latter, we take the number of events weighted by sampling probability, log country population, as well as an agency bias (see Chapter 2).

Note that this effect is visible not only when looking at relative shares but also when looking at the absolute number of party protests. Most importantly, we see a short-lived peak only in 2013 regarding both the share and the absolute number of party protests in SE. Thus, the lower shares of party protests in SE during the shock period and the Euro crisis do not hide a remobilization of parties in absolute terms. The ‘crowding out’ hypothesis is also supported by the share of participants in party protests: Whereas these tend to be very large events in the pre-crisis period, in the crisis period the turnout in these events declines relative to their frequency (see Table 11.1). However, the ‘crowding out’ dynamic is not inherent in all types of crisis. Although our coverage is very short, the EE pattern in particular shows a strong presence of parties in mobilizing on the streets during the refugee crisis.

We also checked potential differences in the type of parties that sponsor protests during the various time periods. There are few clear-cut trends, and the results by period tend to support the ‘outsider status’ of sponsors and the cross-national differences highlighted before (again, see Figure 11.3). However, there is one noteworthy exception as the share of non-mainstream compared to mainstream parties in SE has increased from around 50 per cent of all party protests in the so-called ‘normal times’ to 66.8 per cent in the shock period and more than 78 per cent during the Euro crisis.<sup>2</sup> The finding further qualifies the observation that political parties did not recapture the streets in SE during the economic crisis. As it turns out, non-mainstream or challenger parties increased their standing in the protest arena, but mainstream parties disappeared almost completely. This mirrors the negative effects of economic protests on the electoral fortunes of mainstream parties (regardless of whether they are in opposition or government) which we uncovered in Chapter 10.

In the crisis, we observe not only changing levels of party protests but also changing types of party protests. Table 11.2 shows the distribution of issues in party protests before the crisis, in the shock period and during the Euro crisis. Contrary to our ‘riding the wave’ hypothesis, the share of political issues in party protests decline (although they still stay at a relatively high level) and there is no universal increase of party protests on economic issues. But note that the share of party protests on economic issues almost triples in SE during the Euro crisis, and there is a small increase although on a lower level in NWE in the shock period as well. However, except for the south in the Euro crisis, political parties are the least likely to protest on economic relative to other

<sup>2</sup> Detailed results available from the authors.

Table 11.2. *The development of issues in party protests by region and period*

	Normal times				Shock period				Euro crisis			
	Econ.	Cult-lib.	Cult-cons.	Pol.	Econ.	Cult-lib.	Cult-cons.	Pol.	Econ.	Cult-lib.	Cult-cons.	Pol.
North-western Europe	11	29	18	29	23	35	19	23	14	27	29	20
Southern Europe	12	20	5	27	13	33	0	35	37	15	11	25
Eastern Europe	16	15	15	40	0	18	41	27	11	20	31	27

*Note:* The table shows the relative share on an issue category in per cent of all protests in a given region and period. They do not add up to a 100 per cent, as ‘other’ issues are included in the calculation but not shown in the table. We do not show the values for the refugee crisis given the very short coverage in our dataset. We highlight strong upward changes as compared to the reference period in bold and strong downward changes in italics;  $\ln (x\_crisis/x\_normal\ times) >0.4$  or  $>-0.4$ .

issues in all regions and periods. In EE, the share of economic issues in party protests has even declined since the onset of the Great Recession. In contrast, there is a relative increase in party protests on cultural issues. In NWE and EE, the increase is driven by culturally conservative mobilization. In SE the increase is mostly driven by mobilization in favour of cultural liberalism in the shock period, although we also observe a strong increase of culturally conservative claims as compared to the so-called 'normal times'.

If we look at the ideological stances of the party sponsors, we observe that the shift towards economic issues in NWE during the shock period and in SE during the Euro crisis is driven mainly by the political left. Left-wing parties in the two regions are more likely to sponsor protests over economic issues than their competitors on the right throughout the research period, but the differences become most pronounced in those two periods. Around 41 per cent of all events sponsored by the left in NWE during the shock period centre on economic issues as compared to 8 per cent of the events sponsored by the right; the respective values for the south during the Euro crisis are 46 per cent (left) versus 6 per cent (right).<sup>3</sup> However, it is important to note that both in the north-west and in the south left-wing parties are more likely to sponsor protests over non-economic issues in all other periods. Interestingly, we observe no such differences in the salience of economic issues between the political left and right in EE during any period. There, non-economic issues are key for the protest mobilization of both left and right throughout the research period.

In the final step of the analysis, we explore the descriptive findings in a regression framework to test their robustness when we simultaneously control for contextual and event level characteristics. In addition, we use the regression setup to map the extent to which the various types of parties differ from each other. In terms of statistical models, our analysis relies on logit models with standard errors clustered according to country\*year. We use our models to predict party sponsored protests in general and protests sponsored by left/right or mainstream/non-mainstream parties. The independent variables refer to the European macro regions, the phases of the crisis, the issues of the event, the number of participants, and the presence of unions or other organizations. Instead of the logit coefficients we report average marginal effects to ease interpretation and provide comparable estimates. Table 11.3 presents the results.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed results available from the authors.

First, we checked the baseline assumption that parties are more important actors in the protest arena in eastern Europe than in western Europe. The simple models (which do not control for any event-level characteristics) once again support this claim, although the predictive power of the models is rather small. Note that it is higher if we predict sponsorship by right-wing and moderate parties, respectively. This mirrors our previous findings on the different types of parties sponsoring protest in the different regions. In addition, the models once again highlight that there is no cross-regional ‘crisis effect’ in terms of party-sponsorship. By contrast, the marginal effects plot shown in Figure 11.5 indicates the very region-specific effects of the different ‘period dummies’.<sup>4</sup> Most importantly, the results highlight that, in relative terms, parties in SE have been crowded out by other types of protest actors in the immediate shock period and in the Euro crisis. In contrast, in NWE and EE the share of parties seems to be increasing during the Euro crisis. In all three regions parties are the most present in the refugee crisis. However, one should note the high uncertainty of these estimates due to the relatively short coverage of the refugee crisis in our dataset.

Finally, the models with event level characteristics in Table 11.3 show (1) that our expectations and the descriptive findings on issues, alliances, and participants do hold in the regression context and (2) that the predictive power of the models substantially increases if we take the composition of events into account. Parties are not likely to sponsor events with unions or other organizations. Although it is somewhat counterintuitive, the presence of unions or other organizations has the smallest predictive power for the presence of parties on the left. That is because left parties are the most present in party protests (Figure 11.3), therefore these parties hardly rely on co-sponsorship to make themselves seen in the ‘streets’. As the small coefficients for issues show, the events that parties sponsor are similar to the supply of events in the protest arena at large, with some notable differences. Parties on the left are the only ones more likely to sponsor protests on economic issues. Parties in general, and particularly on the right, are less likely to sponsor events on economic issues and more likely to sponsor events on cultural issues. Unsurprisingly, the right has a slight tendency to sponsor events advocating cultural conservatism and xenophobia, while the mainstream parties avoid sponsoring protests on cultural issues. The findings for the number of participants confirm that party protests tend to be larger than other protests.

<sup>4</sup> Detailed results available from the authors.

Table 11.3. Average marginal effects from logit models of general party sponsorship and sponsorship by specific party types

	Parties		Left		Right		Non-mainstream		Mainstream	
Southern Europe (ref: north-western Europe)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Eastern Europe	0.11*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.00)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.00)
Shock period (ref: normal times)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Euro crisis	0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01*** (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01** (0.01)	-0.01** (0.00)
Refugee crisis	0.09* (0.05)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Economic issue (dichotomous)		-0.02** (0.01)		0.01* (0.01)		-0.01 (0.01)		-0.00 (0.01)		0.00 (0.01)
Cultural liberalism (dichotomous)		0.04*** (0.01)		0.03*** (0.01)		-0.01 (0.00)		0.04*** (0.00)		-0.00 (0.00)
Cultural conservatism (dichotomous)		0.05*** (0.01)		-0.03*** (0.00)		0.03*** (0.01)		0.04*** (0.01)		-0.02*** (0.00)
Political issue (dichotomous)		0.06*** (0.01)		0.02*** (0.01)		0.01** (0.00)		0.02*** (0.01)		0.01*** (0.00)
No. of participants (continuous)		0.00*** (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)		0.00*** (0.00)		-0.00 (0.00)		0.00*** (0.00)
Unions (dichotomous)		-0.56*** (0.03)		-0.18*** (0.02)		-0.13*** (0.02)		-0.16*** (0.02)		-0.14*** (0.02)
Other organizations (dichotomous)		-0.40*** (0.01)		-0.12*** (0.01)		-0.12*** (0.01)		-0.14*** (0.01)		-0.09*** (0.01)
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.03	0.60	0.01	0.30	0.06	0.45	0.01	0.37	0.06	0.37
No. of observations	16,921	16,921	16,921	16,921	16,921	16,921	16,921	16,921	16,921	16,921

Note: Standard errors are clustered by country\*years. Standard errors in parentheses.  
\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.1$ .

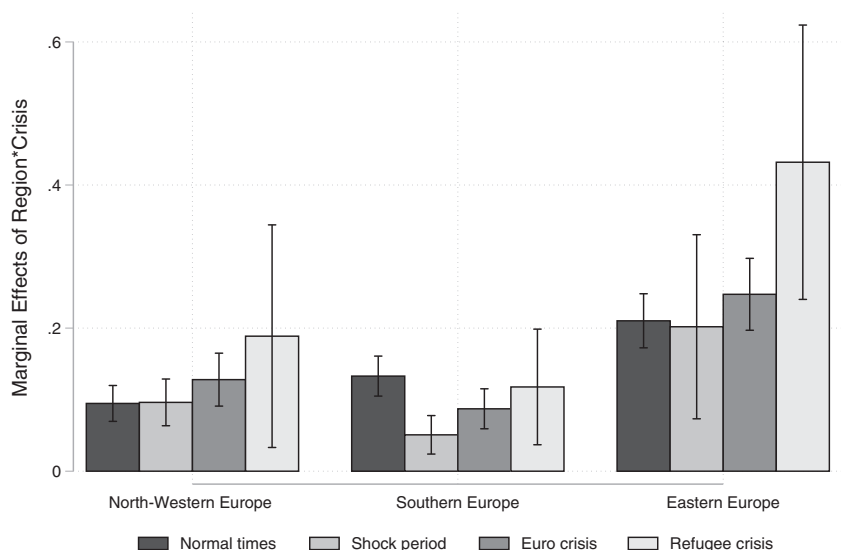


Figure 11.5 Marginal effects of two-way interactions between region and crisis period.

*Note:* The marginal effects are estimated from the interaction between the region and crisis categorical variables. The model does not control for event-level characteristics.

## 11.6 Conclusions

We started the chapter with the aim to describe and explain the ‘big picture’ of party protests across the three European macro regions. Most importantly, we were interested in whether political parties could ‘recapture’ the streets in Europe in times of crisis. Building on the work of Kitschelt (2003), we expected differentiation between the two arenas of protest and electoral politics, with parties primarily located in the latter. Nevertheless, we argued, there are important regional differences both in how parties responded to the crisis – as observed through the lens of party protests – and in the extent to which the two arenas are differentiated.

Our analysis built on new grounds to the extent to which the boundaries of the two arenas have hardly been empirically shown. The results confirm our expectations: Party protests are a relatively rare phenomenon and overwhelmingly used by the opposition. Nevertheless, parties occasionally decide to mobilize on the ‘streets’, and there are important

regional differences to explain their presence. Most importantly, our results highlight that in EE – where parties are seen as the main political actor, often the ‘only game in town’ – we observe the highest level of party protests. In addition, we uncovered regional differences in the type of party protests, i.e. in terms of the type of parties and issues. Whereas in NWE and SE, we observe a strong presence of radical parties and parties from the left, in EE, we find a different dynamic. Party protests in the East are driven by parties from the right and by mainstream parties. Nevertheless, the East is rather like the north-west in terms of the issues of party protests, with a focus on cultural claims. However, as we have argued these are cultural issues of a different type, with a strong dominance of mobilization against the cultural liberalism associated with the new social movements. Compared to the other two regions, in SE, economic issues play a more important role, and in party protests cultural issues are less prevalent.

We expected the Great Recession to influence both the level and the type of party protests. Concerning the level of party protests, we expected that parties become less important in the countries hardest hit by the crisis. Our results confirm our expectation: We observe a ‘crowding-out’ of parties from the streets in SE in the shadow of the Great Recession. The latter finding mirrors the discrediting of established political elites and parties in that region and confirms the analysis in previous chapters on the character and driving forces of protest waves (Chapters 5 and 6). The mainstream parties almost completely disappeared from the streets in SE during the Great Recession. This is in line with the finding from Chapter 10 as protests reinforced the negative effects of economic misery on electoral support of mainstream parties in general. Although left-wing parties were more likely to sponsor protests on economic issues during certain periods in NWE and SE, the Great Recession has not brought about a drastic change in the type of parties and issues involved in party protests.

Overall, political parties were not very successful in ‘recapturing’ the streets, i.e. in increasing their standing in the protest arena. Thus, our bird’s eye view on parties in the protest arena qualifies the emerging links between social movements and challenger parties. These links left important marks on the development of the new or transformed parties and, in some cases, on the entire party systems (see della Porta et al. 2017). However, they did not lead to ever more party protests and, based on this indicator, the two arenas remain much more differentiated in SE and NWE than in EE. In this regard, the crisis has reinforced existing patterns rather than transformed the dynamics of party protests.



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